

U.S. Congressman Mark Kirk visited a Mount Prospect Marathon station this week to illustrate the kinds of measures he feels will lower gas prices.

Among them would be the expansion of the number of gas stations that sell “E85” fuel, which contains 85 percent ethanol.

E85 sells for 20 cents less than regular unleaded gasoline in Illinois and up to 60 cents cheaper in states like Minnesota and North Dakota that heavily promote the fuel.

Formula Automotive, the Marathon station at 310 W. Northwest Hwy. where Kirk made his appearance, sells 200 to 300 gallons per week of the fuel, said service manager Bob Massey. He said the station started selling it five years ago.

“One of the biggest purchasers for us is the post office,” he said.

One of the fuel’s advantages, he said, is its flexibility. If one needs to refill at another gas station that doesn’t sell E85, “You can mix it with regular and unleaded, and it won’t disrupt your car.”

Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, said that while the number of E85 fueling stations in Illinois has more than tripled in the past year, there still aren’t enough of them in Chicago and the suburbs.

In Illinois, there are more than 100 such stations, including sites in Arlington Heights, Des Plaines, Elgin, Lombard, Naperville and Palatine.

Such vehicles as the Chevy Impala and the Ford Taurus are designed to burn E85.

In addition to increasing reliance on E85, Kirk suggested a cocktail of federal legislation to help reduce gas prices. He supports ending local fuel monopolies, raising fuel economy standards, providing tax credits for owners of hybrid cars and helping create new oil refineries.

“Federal action is needed to lower gas prices,” said Kirk. “Rising oil prices hurt our pocketbooks and threaten our economy.”

Kirk also said he supports congressional action calling on the Federal Trade Commission to stop what he called price gouging.

“I will work to make sure the commission has what it needs to protect Americans from unfair gas pricing. If speculators are guilty of withholding supplies, their betrayal should suffer the full prosecution of the commission and Justice Department,” he said.